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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 004415

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KUWAITI CALLS BMENA MEETING A SUCCESS, REITERATES
PERCEPTION OF IMBALANCE IN BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

REF: SECDEF 092102Z DEC 04

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) Summary: In a December 18 call on Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Ambassador stressed the gravity of recent security threats to U.S. and Kuwaiti interests and noted the weakness of the GOK legal instruments in combating terrorist financing. (SEPTEL) The two also addressed GOK views on the "Forum for the Future" meeting in Morocco, the need for continued fuel for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and the impact on the Kuwaiti private sector of U.S. military use of Kuwaiti ports. End Summary.

Impressions of "Forum of the Future"

2. (C) FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammed led the Kuwaiti delegation to the "Forum of the Future" December 10-11 meeting in Rabat. The FM reported that government participants arrived to anti-U.S. demonstrations on the streets of Rabat and added that most civil society groups were outright negative about the U.S. during meetings. Nevertheless, he viewed the forum as a symbolic success as prior to September 11, 2001, the topic of reform could not even be discussed in the region. He said that the process of discussing democracy in the region had advanced considerably over the last three years.

OIF Oil Renewal

3. (C) Dr. Mohammed asked Ambassador for a his impressions of the recent meeting between PM Shaykh Sabah and SECDEF Rumsfeld. In this context, the Ambassador mentioned that we will be asking the GOK to extend the agreement for OIF fuel March 2005. The Ambassador addressed the GOK perception (as expressed by the PM) that the U.S. is asking too much from Kuwait in the bilateral relationship by asserting that the relationship is too valuable to damage over such a gap in mutual perceptions. The FM remarked that members of the National Assembly are questioning the government about the heavy demands placed by the U.S. on Kuwait, with a focus on the arrangements for fuel. He said that the current coverage of costs under the DCA would be protected, but that this would not apply to Iraq operations. Dr. Mohammed also noted specific rumblings in the National Assembly (echoing the complaint to SECDEF by the PM) that the U.S. is not asking other GCC nations, specifically Oman, Qatar, and the UAE to provide anything comparable to the contribution that Kuwait is making to U.S. efforts to maintain regional security. (See reftel for memcon of SECDEF meeting.)

U.S. Military Movements Impeding Kuwaiti Commerce

4. (C) FM Dr. Mohammed also stated that the use of the Shuaiba port by U.S. military vessels is impacting Kuwait's private sector. Kuwait Cement Company, whose chairman sits on the board of Rashid Al-Rashid's (a Kuwaiti business mogul) company, has complained that U.S. ships are blocking the company's two piers, preventing the delivery of raw materials used to produce cement. At this rate, the FM added, Kuwait soon will have to halt cement production. He asked the U.S. to be sensitive to the GOK's concerns. The Ambassador said he would raise the issue with CFFLC, but noted that heavy troop rotations scheduled for January-April would complicate the issue. (The FonMin has previously raised the issue of returning use of the land facilities around the port currently used by U.S. forces, which are slated for extensive private sector development.)

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